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HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

VOL. 130 NO. 10 8 Pages Wednesday, March 9, 2011 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Commander puts the focus on jobs after deployment

Editor's Note: The following story was written and submitted by Staff Sgt. Pat Caldwell, 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry, 3rd Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs, 103rd Sustainment Command (Expeditionary). Lt. Col. Phil Appleton is the son of Heppner resident Wendy (Appleton) Andrews.

Joint Base Balad, Iraq - When the soldiers of eastern Oregon's 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry, 3rd Sustainment Brigade, 103rd Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), return home after their tour of duty at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, they will collide with an array of programs to help reintegrate them into a civilian way of life.

But there is one challenge that may be more difficult for them to overcome: finding jobs.

While plenty of attention is focused on helping soldiers deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other factors associated with overseas duty; lack of employment is one of those problems often recognized, but has more difficulty being solved.

In December, Oregon's jobless rate hovered at 10.4 percent while the unemployment rate in several eastern Oregon counties ran the gamut between 16 percent for Grant County, and 10 percent in Union County.

The commander of the 3rd Battalion, Lt. Col. Phil Appleton, admitted the unemployment outlook may appear daunting, especially for men and women absent from the workforce for more than a year. That is why Appleton and the 3rd Battalion's senior enlisted advisor, Command Sgt. Maj. Bill Wyllie, are already molding a plan to help soldiers find jobs when they return home.

Appleton said often the picture of a soldier is one-dimensional. He said, though, that each guardsman functions and succeeds based on three critical pillars. "There are three legs that support a guardsman. The guard, his employer and his family," Appleton said.

A key piece of Appleton and Wyllie's plan revolves around preparing now, for work in the autumn even as 3rd Battalion guardsmen conduct convoy escort missions in central Iraq. "We have to sit down and question soldiers about their long-term employment plan. Are they going to school? If so, are they aware of their GI bill benefits? Are they underemployed? Is the job they are working in lacking in longevity?" Appleton said.

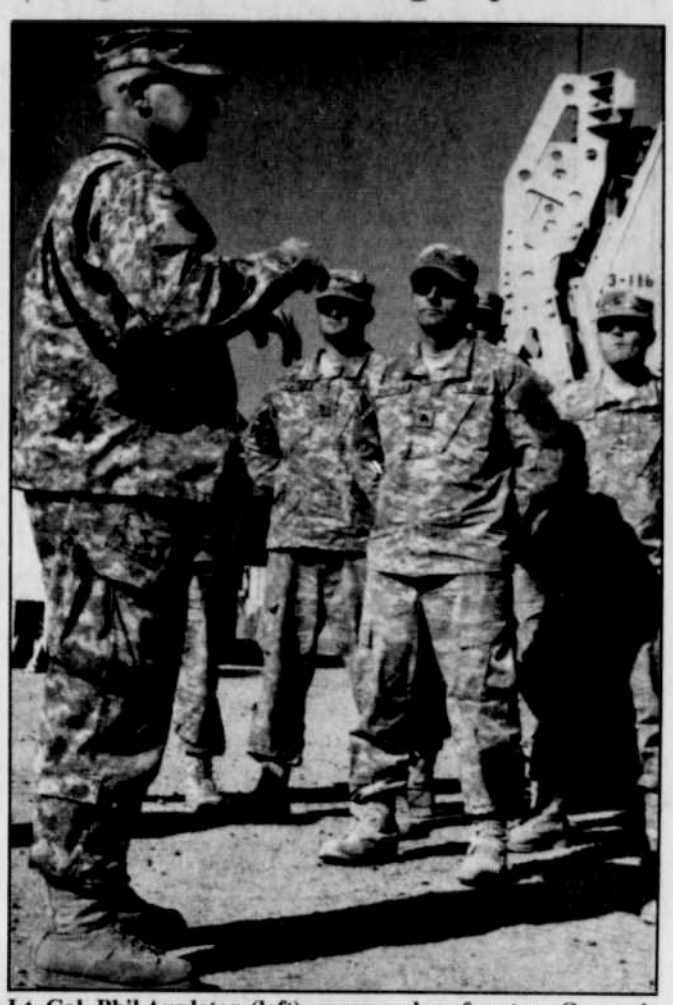
He added that despite the unemployment rate, there are jobs for his guardsmen because of what he calls intangibles. "And here is why: Our soldiers are dependable, they know how to show up on time and follow instructions and they know how to lead and follow. These are the intangibles. You don't have to hope with our soldiers," he said.

Appleton said Wyllie will spearhead an effort during the next few months to talk with guardsmen who will most likely be unemployed when they return home later this year. They will be asked to put together a resume. When a soldier finishes with the resume, a group of officers and senior noncommissioned officers in the 3rd Battalion will go through each document to polish it.

Appleton's plan doesn't stop there. "I'm also talking about job interviews with soldiers while they are here, over the phone," he said. "Going on unemployment is not something we are going to discuss. Unemployment is only an emergency fall back if we are unsuccessful in finding employment for the Soldier," he said.

Appleton said the ambitious job outline he and Wyllie are preparing actually comes back to taking care of soldiers. "The sergeant major and I care about our soldiers. I'm willing to accept losing soldiers so they can gain employment. If they get a job in another state, that is just something I have to accept," he said.

Yet he said he isn't too concerned with watching his soldiers leave the 3rd Battalion even if they secure employment in a nearby state. "They will want to stay in this unit because they understand this unit takes care of its own," he said.



Lt. Col. Phil Appleton (left), commander of eastern Oregon's Army Guard unit, the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment, talks to a group of soldiers recently at Joint Base Balad, Iraq. Appleton is busy framing an ambitious plan to help his soldiers find employment once they return home from a one-year deployment to Iraq. *-Photo by SSG Pat Caldwell*

Health district sees big gain in January

The Morrow County Health District got especially good news with the receipt of the district's financial data for January-a $216,680 profit for the month. Every revenue source was up, amounting to $726,583 in gross patient revenue, compared to $533,100 in gross patient revenue for December. This gives the district a $98,985 year-to-date profit, only slightly off a $99,876 budget goal, and a $14,140 average monthly year-to-date gain.

The district has $99,657 on the books for hospital inpatient revenue for January, compared to $64,240 in December; $151,187 in inpatient ancillary revenue, compared to $50,010 for the previous month; $316,052 in outpatient ancillary revenue, compared to $283,029, $105,850 in clinic revenue, compared to $98,446 and $53,835 for Home Health/ Hospice revenue, compared to $37,373 the month previous. Total operating revenue for January, including bad debts and contractual and other adjustments, $94,733 in tax revenue and $3,766 in other revenue, was $769,954, compared to $655,774 in December.

In other business:

-CEO Michael Blauer told the board that the new CT scanner at Pioneer Memorial Hospital is up and running well with "really good" images.

-Blauer said that the district is "on the verge" of signing a contract for an electronic medical records system. Electronic medical records are a federal mandate. Molly Rhea, director of PMH nursing services, said she thought that electronic records will help patients' outcomes.

-Blauer told the board that the Community Health Improvement Project meeting, held earlier in the day at the Port of Morrow in Boardman, was positive.

-Blauer reported than improvements have been made at Pioneer Memorial Clinic in Heppner concerning sound absorption and improvements have also been made to the lobby at the Irrigon Medical Clinic.

-Blauer reported that the new physician's assistant at the Irrigon Clinic is doing well. Board Chair Larry Mills commented that the district had earlier made a commitment to make improvements to that clinic.

-Rhea told the board that six patients will be in long-term care at PMH after another move-in next Monday. "We're working hard to keep people here," said Rhea, who was commended by Blauer and the board.

-The board received the following report: Irrigon Medical Clinic had 154 patients for January with 21 new patients, 22 seen by a nurse and nine no-shows; Pioneer Memorial Clinic had 502 patients seen in January with 31 new patients, 39 seen by a nurse and eight no-shows; Heppner Ambulance had 20 total page-outs with 16 transports for $16,775 in revenue; Boardman Ambulance had 17 page-outs with eight transports for $9,659 in revenue; Irrigon Ambulance had 16 page-outs, 11 transports for $10,862; there were no flights; Pioneer Memorial Hospital had eight admissions, one swing bed admission, 10 admitted for observation, 426 total outpatients, 65 total emergency room encounters, 1701 lab tests, 118 x-ray procedures, 14 CT scans, 33 EKG tests, one treadmill procedure, five colonoscopy procedures, one colon/ endoscopy procedure, 100 respiratory therapy procedures; Home Health had 134 patient visits, Hospice had two admits and 190 total patient days, compared to 123 the previous month and Pharmacy had 1467 drug doses for $144,585 in drug revenue, compared to 829 drug doses and $42,980 the previous month.

Pot of Gold at the end of the Heppner rainbow

If there is a better photo to illustrate St. Patrick's Day in Heppner, we haven't seen it yet. This photo was submitted to the Heppner Gazette-Times with the following note attached:
Dear Sir, I was recently in Heppner after having been away for 27 years. I was in town to visit family at the Wilkinson Ranch. I wanted to submit this photograph to your paper in hopes that it will make it in time for the St. Patrick's Day celebration. I am recently retired from the US Army where I served for the past 23 years as a Combat Photographer / Photo Journalist. The enclosed shot was taken in the morning, on March 4 on the way into town from Willow Creek. If you have a Face book account for Heppner I would be honored to have these submitted to that media venue.
Very Respectfully, Shawn Richard Paine (US Army Retired)
Grandson of Dick and Virginia Wilkinson
Crofton Maryland

NOAA issues monthly climate summary for Heppner

According to preliminary data received by NOAA's National Weather Service in Pendleton, temperatures in Heppner averaged colder than normal during the month of February.

The average temperature was 36.1 degrees which was 2.2 degrees below normal. High temperatures averaged 45.2 degrees, which was 1.9 degrees below normal. The highest was 65 degrees on the 13th. Low temperatures averaged 26.9 degrees, which was 2.5 degrees below normal. The lowest was four degrees, on the 26th.

There were 18 days with the low temperature below 32 degrees. There were two days when the high temperature stayed below 32 degrees.

Precipitation totaled 1.16 inches during February, which was 0.07 inches below normal. Measurable precipitation -at least .01 inch- was received on 11 days with the heaviest, 0.40 inches reported on the 16th. Precipitation this year has reached 1.99 inches, which is 0.70 inches below normal. Since October, the water year precipitation at Heppner has been 7.91 inches, which is 1.43 inches above normal.

Snowfall totaled four inches with at least one inch of snow reported on four days. The heaviest snowfall was 1.0 inches reported on the 18th. The greatest depth of snow on the ground was one inch on the 18th.

The outlook for March from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation. Normal highs for Heppner rise from 52.1 degrees at the start of March to 55.8 degrees at the end of March. Normal lows rise from 32.4 degrees to 34.4 degrees. The 30 year normal precipitation is 1.60 inches.

The National Weather Service is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department.

Daylight Savings Time begins Sunday

Daylight Savings Time will begin Sunday. Don't forget to turn your clocks forward one hour.

IN HEPPNER:
Fencing Sale!
10% off Green Treated Posts- All sizes
Save 5% on Powder River Panels, Gates and Livestock Handling Equipment
5% off Tee Posts
Davis Ranch Hand 2 point barbed wire $64.95
Range Master 2 point barbed wire $49.99
Save March 14th - March 19th
MONTANA SILVERSMITHS 20% off
Morrow County Grain Growers Green Feed & Seed
242 W. Linden Way, Heppner • 676-9422 • 989-8221 (MCGG main office)

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MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.